DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 193 548 CG 014 699

AUTHOR Heath, Linda: And Others
TITLE Rape Stereotypes and Fear: A Control Paradox.
PUB DATE 5 Sep 79
GRANT IR01MH29629-01
NOTE 20p.: Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (87th, New York, NY, September 1-5, 1979). Best copy available. Sponsored by the National Center for the Prevention and Control of Rape.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Crime: *Emotional Response: *Fear: *Females: Individual Differences: Individual Power: Interviews: *Locus of Control: Perception: Prevention: *Rape: *Risk: Sexuality

ABSTRACT

The relationship between women's perceptions of rape controllability and their fear, worry, concern, and perceived risk associated with rape is examined from in-person interviews with women (N=58) in Chicago, San Francisco, and Philadelphia. Women's response to descriptions of the "typical rape" were used to divide them into those with high rape control perceptions, low rape control perceptions, and indeterminate rape control perceptions. Regression analyses showed that women with low rape control perceptions--those who believed rapes happen anywhere, any time to anyone--showed higher fear, worry, and risk levels than those with high rape control perceptions. There was no difference between the amount of concern about rape shown by the two control groups. Findings suggest that women can be alerted to the dangers of rape without having their fear level raised unnecessarily. Rape education efforts need not focus solely on totally uncontrollable rapes in order to reach audiences: they should address the entire spectrum of rape experiences. (Author/NRB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED193548

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Rape Stereotypes and Fear: A Control Paradox

Linda Heath

Department of Criminal Justice Studies
University of Minnesota

Stephanie Riger

Center for Urban Affairs
Northwestern University

Margaret T. Gordon

Medill School of Journalism
and
Center for Urban Affairs
Northwestern University

and

Robert LeBailly
Center for Urban Affairs
Northwestern University

Presented at the meetings of the American Psychological Association, New York, NY, September 5, 1979.

This research was funded by grant No. 1RolMH29629-01 from the National Center for the Prevention and Control of Rape.

CG 014699

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Stephanie Riger

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Rape Stereotypes and Fear: A Control Paradox

Introduction

Rape is a crime which is surrounded by myths and misperceptions. The traditional view of rape is that no woman can be raped against her will, that women who get raped are asking for it, and that women just cry rape to cover up for consensual sexual affairs (Burt, 1978). In the mid-1960's, social activists and researchers became concerned about the effects of such rape views on rape victims. Researchers documented the self-blame and social stigma which rape victims experienced (Burgess and Holstrom, 1974). Social activists proclaimed that women were being raped twice, once by the rapist and once by the courts and society (Medea and Thompson, 1974). And theorists claimed traditional rape views were a heinous example of blaming the victim (Brownmiller, 1975; Weis and Weis, 1975). Consequently, shattering the traditional veiw of rape became the focus of a concerted rape education effort. Articles, pamphlets, and television talk shows focusing on rape proliferated, all emphasizing the new rape dictum: anyone can be raped, anywhere, any time. For example, one rape pamphlet states that victims of sexual assault include men, women, infants, children, grandmothers, prostitutes and the physically and mentally handicapped (Sexual Trauma Center, Note 1). That same pamphlet states that attackers can be "anyone: family members, friends, neighbors, doctors, clergy, friends, friends of friends, and occasionally strangers," (Sexual Trauma Center, Note 1). And a recent article in a popular women's magazine explored the traditional stereotype of rape and then expounded on the rape education view (Dreifuss, 1979).

> It happens only to loose women, according to this myth. 'That's never happened to me because I'm careful about where I go,' explained a housewife in Northbrook, Illinois. 'I don't go to bars. I don't talk to strangers. I don't wear tight clothes. I don't go out walking alone at night.' The implication is clear: Women who get raped are of bad reputation; they're incautious and/or stupid. And while victim-blaming in rape is unfair when it comes from men, it is self-destructive when it comes from women (Dreifus, 1979, p. 81).

The author elaborates on the rape education view, that rapes happen to anyone from infants to old women, on the street or in their homes, and then states:

> Finally, victims very often are women who trust men: They trust their date; they trust their uncle; they trust their English professor -- and sometimes their trust is repaid with sexual assault (Dreifus, 1979, p. 81).

A woman who attends to this information can no longer believe that as long as she does not roam deserted streets late at night she will be safe from rape. Women can no longer believe that rape is something which is easily avoided -- easily controlled. Bard (1975) comments on the reluctance of women to accept such an uncontrollable view of rape. He says women refuse

> to see rape as a random crime. 'Random' implies that there is nothing any woman can do to prevent rape. Acceptance of this definition means that each

> woman is a potential victim -- in fact, each woman is (p. 38).

The effects of rape controllability perceptions have not been investigated. One can assume that a woman who is a victim of rape would feel less guilt and personal blame if she perceives the rape as uncontrollable, perhaps avoiding part of the Rape Trauma Syndrome (Holstrom and Burgess, 1978), although, as Janoff-Bulman (Note 2) points out, it is not clear that avoiding such feelings of self-blame is adaptive in the long run. Beyond the effect of such an uncontrollable presentation of rape for the rape victim, the effect of such a view on the general population needs to be taken into account.

In the general population, the incidence of fear of rape is much more pervasive than the incidence of rape. A judge commented that a rapist rapes only one woman but claims thousands as his victims. Griffin (1971) comments that she has never been free of the fear of rape, and women rank rape second only to murder in a tally of crimes which generate fear (Brodyaga, Gates, Singer, Tucker, and White, 1975). The disquiet which people feel when walking on deserted streets or working alone at the office, and the emotional energies which must be expended to deal with such disquiet are only part of the costs of fear of rape. Activities are foregone and mobility restricted by such fear, creating what Biderman calls "missed opportunities" (Biderman, Johnson, McIntyre, and Weir, 1967). For example, Malinowski (1929) described a practice called Yausa which is purported to exist in parts of the Trobriand Islands. In accordance with what Malinowski called "a curious privilege," (p. 232) women engaged in communal weeding have the customary right to attack any man not of their own village and

subject him to "all the sexual violence, obscene cruelty, filthy pollution, and rough handling" (p. 232) they desire. The natives took great amusement in describing the practice in detail to Malinowski, who noted that missionaries and magistrates in the area had been afraid to face the yausa, and that no white man had ever done so. He stated:

> I also was begged not to make any attempt to go south in the yausa season, and I obeyed the advice. And I thus became another proof of the reality of this custom to the natives (p. 234).

He also became another victim of fear of rape.

In American society, where rape is almost exclusively a crime which is perpetrated against women, the additional limitations which are placed on women are evident. Women have traditionally been excluded from certain employment, particularly for nighttime shifts, because of the possibility of sexual assault. Women avoid walking alone at night or going places unaccompanied more often than men (Gordon, Riger, LeBailly, and Heath, Note 3). Women report higher levels of fear of crime in general (Erskine, 1974; Biderman et al., 1967), much of which is due to the additional fear of sexual assault which women experience (Riger, Gordon, and LeBailly, 1978; Gordon et al., Note 3).

So although the Uniform Crime Reports indicate only five of every 10,000 women are raped in a given year, the problem of rape extends far beyond this statistic. Although victimization surveys indicate that rape is significantly underreported to police and the actual incidence is 2 to 10 times the UCR rate (Reynolds and Blyth, 1975)rape extends far beyond this statistic. And although projections from Los Angeles police data indicate that one in every ten women who lives

in L.A. for thirty years will be approached by a rapist during that time (Offir, 1975), the rape problem outstrips even this statistic. Fear of rape is an emotionally draining, behaviorally limiting, and at times debilitating fear which must be considered in our evaluation of methods of dealing with the rape problem. To focus solely on the victim of an actual sexual assault is to ignore the larger number of victims of potential assaults.

The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between perceptions of rape controllability and women's fear of rape and endorsement of rape prevention strategies. This research is not intended to evaluate rape education efforts in general or any specific rape education program. Although it is plausible that a rape pamphlet which informs readers that anyone can be raped anywhere any time leads to perceptions of rape as an uncontrollable act, this has not been empirically demonstrated. This research is also not intended to examine the costs and benefits of fear of rape. Some of the costs of fear of rape are self-evident, but an examination of the potential benefits derived from such fear, whether on the individual level for keeping women protected from rape or on the global level for insuring societal order, are beyond the scope of this study. This examination of the relationship between a concept (control) and its attitudinal and behavioroid consequences is intended to: 1) lay groundwork for more focused evaluations of rape education efforts and 2) provide another piece to the theoretical puzzle of control which social scientists are currently putting together.

METHOD

Women who had originally been contacted by the random digit dialing method for the Reactions to Crime (RTC) and the Fear of Rape (FOR) telephone survey and who agreed to participate in an in-person interview were contacted by professional interviewers employed and trained by the FOR project. The nature of the self-selection which occurred between the telephone and the in-person samples is documented elsewhere (LeBailly, 1979). The primary difference between the samples is that the in-person sample is younger and more affluent than the telephone sample. We have no measure of the nature of the self-selection that occurred in the original generation of the telephone sample, and can only note that the basic demographics of the telephone sample match fairly well the overall demographics for the cities and neighborhoods from which the sample was drawn.

The FOR interview, which lasted from one to two hours, took place either in the respondent's home or in the local FOR office, depending on which was more convenient for the respondent and the interviewer. Upon inception of the interview, the respondent was assured of the confidentiality of her responses, signed an informed consent form and was paid 10 dollars for her participation in the study.

The question from which we identified women with high or low control perceptions is as follows:

> People have different ideas about what rape is like. Please try to describe what you think or imagine to be the 'typical rape.' I mean things like when or where it usually happens, characteristics of the rapist and the

victim, whether or not the rapist and his victim know each other, whether or not the victim gets hurt, police behavior, where the victim gets help, attractiveness of the victim, and so on.

The responses to this question were then coded by the FOR staff into over 100 discrete categories, such as:location, outside; location, dark place; rapist hates women; rapist, anyone; victim, provocative, teasing; and victim, anyone. From this list of categories, sets of key responses which indicated high and low control perceptions were identified. Respondents who had mentioned two or more of either the high or low control responses were identified by Respondent ID number. The complete scripts of their responses were examined to determine overall control perception evident from their descriptions of the typical rape. Two raters evaluated the persence or absence of a high or low control perception in these scripts. This examination was necessary because when the terms which indicated one perception were read in the full context, often the total perception was changed. The inter-rater reliability on this rating was over 90%. Of the 36 respondents identified by key terms as possibly having low control perceptions, 31 were included in the final low control sample. Of the 37 respondents identified by key terms as possibly having high control perception, 27 were included in the final high control perception sample.

Major Dependent Measures: Fear, Worry, Concern, Risk

Numerous items from the in-person survey address attitudes about crime, both in general and about rape in particular. The major question from the survey for assessing fear is as follows:

What about after dark? How safe do you feel when you are out alone in your neighborhood after dark? Responses: very safe, reasonably safe, somewhat unsafe, very unsafe, never go out after dark.

The worry dimension is tapped in several ways on the in-person instrument. The general version is as follows:

How worried, or uneasy do you feel after dark, on this scale from 0 to 10 when you are at home alone?

How worried or uneasy do you feel walking alone on the streets in your neighborhood after dark?

Additionally, several specific worry measures were taken, such as:

How worried do you feel being downtown alone after dark?

How worried are you walking by vacant lots or parks anywhere in the city after dark?

The concern dimension was measured by the following question:

As far as you know, is rape a big problem, something of a problem, or not much of a problem in your neighborhood?

The respondent's subjective estimate of her own risk of rape was assessed by this question:

What do you think the chances are that someone would try to rape you or sexually assault you in your neighborhood at night? (0= No Possibility at All, 10 = Extremely High)

There were additional risk ratings, such as:

Do you think your chances of being raped here are higher, about the same, or lower than the chances of being raped downtown in the city?

What rank on the 0 to 10 scale would you give the likelihood of your being raped when downtown at night?

RESULTS

Sample Integrity

Since respondents in the survey study were not randomly assigned to control condition but rather self-selected into condition on the basis of their descriptions of the typical rape, I first examined the high and low control groups to see if they differed significantly on any important dimensions. The three main dimensions I investigated were age, income, and educational level, since these three seemed to be likely candidates for problematic differences. The analyses of the patterns of education and income by control group showed no significant difference between the groups. (For education, $\chi^2(7) = 9.05$, n.s.. For income, $\chi^2(6) = 8.28$, n.s..) The distribution of income and educational achievement by control condition is given in Table 1 and 2 respectively. The examination of age by condition revealed significant differences between the high and low control groups, ($t(55) = 2.65$, $p < .05$) with the mean age in the low control group being lower than the mean age in the high control group (mean = 32.3 and 42.1 respectively).

Major Dependent Variables

Risk. The major item for assessing the respondents' perceived risk of rape on the in-person survey was "What do you think the chances are that someone would try to rape you or sexually assault you in your neighborhood at night?" Without control condition in the regression equation, none of the three demographic variables accounted for enough of the variance to enter with an F to enter parameter set at 1.0 (cf. Draper and Smith, 1966). Control

TABLE 1

Distribution of Income

By Control Condition

	Less than $6,000	$6,000-9,999	$10,000-14,999	$15,000-19,999	$20,000-24,999	$25,000-29,999	Over $30,000
Low Control	6	4	7	7	2	1	2
High Control	6	11	4	2	1	0	1

$\chi^2_6 = 8.28$, n.s.

TABLE 2

Educational Level

By Control Condition

	8th Grade or Less	Some High School	High School Grad	Business or Trade School	Some College	College Grad	Some Post Grad	Post Grad Degree
Low Control	0	5	13	1	6	1	2	3
High Control	5	6	7	1	2	1	3	2

$\chi^2_7 = 9.05$, n.s.

condition, however, did account for a significant proportion of the variance in this variable, ($F(1,52) = 5.61$, $p < .05$, standardized beta = .31), with women with high control perceptions feeling less at risk of rape (mean response = 3.48, with 0 indicating low chances and 9 indicating high chances) than did women with low control perceptions (mean response = 5.25).

The item which asked about a respondent's chances of being raped downtown at night did not have a significant amount of variance explained by control condition ($F(1,51) = 1.73$, n.s.).

Worry. Amount of worry associated with several different situations was measured on the survey. Many of these items could not be analyzed, however, because many women were never in those situations and therefore could not respond. For example, only eleven of the 58 women in the sample could answer the question about how much they worried when in a bar alone. The more general situations for which worry was assessed therefore form the basis of these analyses.

Women were asked to indicate on a scale of 0 to 10 (with 0 indicating "no worry at all" and 10 indicating "very worried or extremely uneasy") how much they worried when home alone after dark. The amount of variance explained by control condition after the demographics have entered the equation is marginally significant ($F(1,51) = 2.89$, $p < .10$, standardized beta = -.23), with women with high control perceptions being less worried than women with low control perceptions of rape (mean worry = 2.96 and 3.90 respectively.). Similarly, the variance in the amount of worry associated with walking on neighborhood streets alone after dark is accounted for partly by the woman's rape control perception ($F(1,51) = 3.55$, $p < .10$, standardized beta = -.28). Again, women with high perpeptions of rape control report less worry (mean response = 4.85) than do women who perceive of rape as being less controllable (mean response = 5.92). Control also accounts for a marginally

significant amount of variance in women's worry about being alone downtown after dark ($F(1,51) = 2.53$, $p < .15$, standardized beta = -.25), again with women with high control perceptions expressing less worry (mean response = 5.66) than do women with low control perceptions (mean response = 7.66).

Concern. Control perceptions did not account for significant amounts of the variance on the concern question. Education and income accounted for significant amounts of variance in response to that question.

Fear. Women's perceptions of rape controllability account for a marginally significant proportion of the variance in responses to the question, "How safe do you feel when you are out alone in the neighborhood after dark?" (1 indicates very safe; 4 indicates very unsafe). Women with high control perceptions report feeling marginally safer ($F(1,52) = 2.91$, $p < .10$, standardized beta = -.24) than do women with low control perceptions (mean responses = 2.18 and 2.63 respectively). Consistent with that finding, women with high rape control perceptions think their neighborhoods are safer (mean response = 2.00) than do women with low rape control perceptions (mean response = 2.35), with control perception again accounting for a marginally significant amount of this difference ($F(1,52) = 3.48$, $p < .10$, standardized beta = 1.25).

DISCUSSION

The following patterns emerged from the previous analyses:

1) Women who accepted the current rape education view of rape, that is, that rapes happen anywhere, anytime, to anyone, showed significantly higher levels of risk of rape, marginally more worry in most situations and marginally more fear than did women who perceived of rape as more controllable.
2) There was no demonstrable difference in amount of concern about rape as a general issue expressed by women with differing perceptions

of rape controllability.

Women with low control perceptions of rape reported higher perceived risk of rape in their neighborhoods at night than did women with higher perceptions of rape controllability. Respondents' assessments of rape risk downtown did not vary depending on their rape controllability views. Perhaps this is because downtown areas of urban centers (such as Chicago, San Francisoo, and Philadelphia) are not as relevant to most respondents as their own neighborhoods are. Since neighborhood areas are the scene of most of respondents' lives, risks associated with those areas are more salient to respondents than risks associated with other areas.

Respondents with low control perceptions of rape also reported feeling more worried in their neighborhoods at night and at home at night, and slightly more worried downtown at night thant did respondents with higher control perceptions. This worry, however, is not tied directly to rape but is rather a general uneasiness or nervousness. Whether women define their worry as rape related or not is not as important as recognizing that, consciously or unconsciously, women are more worried in a variety of situations if they consider rape to be uncontrollable.

Respondents with low control perceptions of rape also reported feeling more fearful, or, to be precise, less safe, alone in their neighborhoods after dark and generally though of their neighborhoods as more dangerous places than did women with high control perceptions of rape.

Though more fearful, worried, and perceiving higher risk of rape, women with low control perceptions of rape were not more concerned about rape as a general problem. Alternatively, although women who thought of rape as a more controllable event reported lower feelings of fear, worry

and risk, they did not dismiss rape as an unimportant problem. This indicates that women can be concerned about a topic without being frightened into the realization that a problem exists. This finding also brings into question activists' belief that anger generated from fear is the mobilizing force behind change. While anger was not addressed as a variable in this research, these findings do show that fear is not the only path to concern.

These findings suggest that women can be alerted to the dangers of rape without having their fear levels raised unnecessarily. This suggests that rape education efforts do not have to focus solely on the totally uncontrollable rapes in order to reach their audiences, and, that to do so, might actually be more harmful than addressing the entire spectrum of rape experiences.

Reference Notes

1. Pamphlet from the Sexual Trauma Center, 135 Polk Street, San Francisco, California 94102.

2. Janoff-Bulman, Ronnie. "Self-blame in rape victims: A control maintenance strategy." Paper presented at meeting of American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada, 1978.

3. Gordon, M.; Riger, S.; LeBailly, R.; and Heath, L. "Crime, women and the quality of urban life," Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society, in press.

References

Bard, Morton. Cited in: "Rape: Exploding the myths," Bernstein, Ellen & Rommel, Brandy. Today's Health, Oct. 1975, 36+.

Biderman, Albert D.; Johnson, Louise A.; McIntyre, Jennie; & Weir, Adrianne W. Report on a pilot study in the District of Columbia on victimization and attitudes toward law enforcement. Field Surveys No. 1. A report of a research study submitted to The President's Commission on Law Enforcement & Administration of Justice. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967.

Brodyaga, Linda; Gates, Margaret; Singer, Susan; Tucker, Maina; & White, Richardson. Rape and its Victims: A Report for Citizens, Health Facilities and Criminal Justice Agencies. (Washington: NILECJ-LEAA) 1975.

Brownmiller, Susan. Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975.

Burgess, Ann W. & Holmstrom, Lynda L. "Rape trauma syndrome," American Journal of Psychiatry, 1974 (Sept.) 131 (9) 981-986.

Burt, M. "Rape myths & consequences for apprehending and treating sexual assailants." Paper presented at meetings of American Psychological Assn., September 1, 1978, Toronto, Canada.

Draper, N. & Smith, H. Applied Regression Analysis, New York: John Wiley, 1966.

Dreifus, Claudia. "It can happen to any woman," Redbook, March 1979, p. 35+.

Erskine, Hazel. "The Polls: Fear of violence and crime." Public Opinion Quarterly 38, (Spring, 1974) 131-145.

Griffin, Susan. "Rape: The all-American crime" in Forcible Rape: The crime, the victim and the offender. Chappell, Duncan; Geis, Robley; and Geis, Gilbert, editors. Columbia University Press, 1977, pp. 47-66.

Holmstrom, Lynda Lytle & Burgess, Ann Wolbert. The victim of rape: Institutional reactions, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York 1978.

LeBailly, R., Method artifacts in telephone and in-person interviews: An examination of bias and consistency. Unpublished Manuscript. Center for Urban Affairs, Northwestern University, 1979.

Malinowski, Bronislaw (1929). The Sexual Life of Savages (in Northwestern Melenasia), George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., London, (1929).

Medea, Andrea and Thompson, Kathleen, Against Rape, Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York, 1974.

Offir, Carole Wade. "Don't take it lying down," Psychology Today, January 1975, p. 73.

Reynolds, Paul D. and Blyth, Dale A. "Sources of variation affecting the relationship between police and survey - based estimates of crime rates." Victimology: A New Focus, Volume III, Crimes, Victims, and Justice, Edited by Israel Drapkin and Emilio Viano, D. C. Heath & Company, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1975.

Riger, S.; Gordon, M.; and LeBailly, R.; "Women's fear of crime: From blaming to restricting the victim," Victimology, 3, (1978) 285-296.

Weis, Kurt and Weis, Sandra. "Victimology and the justification of rape," in Victimology: A New Focus, Vol. 5, Exploiters and Exploited, the dynamics of victimization, D. C. Heath and Company 1975, Lexington, Massachusetts, edited by Israel Drapkin & Emilio Viano.